

Castlemaine Naturalist

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Marauding Musk Lorikeets

photo Noel Young

PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR 2008

For our club 2008 was a full and productive year, with some innovations and the cessation of one regular activity. We had an interesting and varied array of speakers – some local, some imports. Although we tried to match field trips with the subject of the previous night's speaker, this was not always possible.

Following the 2008 AGM Beth Mellick of the Norman Wettenhall Foundation spoke about the Biodiversity Blueprint Project for the Mount Alexander Shire. The purpose of the project is to protect and enhance biodiversity in the shire. This was followed by a trip to the Metcalfe Cascades. In March Gary Cheers told us about the Wildlife Rescue Service, giving us a list of do's and don'ts should we encounter any injured wildlife. Unfortunately the proposed field trip to the Paddy's Ranges State Park had to be postponed until April due to there being a total fire ban on the day of the field trip. However Gary kindly made himself available for the April field trip.

Already we had got ourselves out of sync with matching up field trips with speaker's subject. However as our April speaker was Carol Hall, who entranced us with her knowledge and photos of the Canyons of the Colorado Plateau, we were definitely unable to take a field trip to the Grand Canyon.

In May Sid Cowling's subject was Wetlands and the wildlife such areas contain. Our field trip was to the Crocodile Reservoir at Fryerstown and the Railway Dam at Tunnel Hill. June brought us Mike Weston who spoke on Wildlife Conservation and Beach-nesting Birds. He told us of the danger posed to these birds by people using the beach for recreational purposes.

In June and July we joined forces on field trips with Ballarat (their day) and Maryborough (our day) respectively. The Ballarat group was in search of fungi; on the Maryborough trip their members took us to the Battery Dam and to the Aboriginal wells. We also held our own June field trip to the Gowar School and Smith's Reef. Nigel Harland, who had written an informative article about Cocos Keeling and Christmas Islands for the April newsletter, treated us to a talk and his

superb photos of the islands at the July meeting. August brought us Sheila Houghton who gave us an excellent talk on fungi. Next day she led our field trip to Firth Park, where she identified many species of fungi for us.

The Listening Earth duo of Andrew Skeoch and Sarah Koschak in September treated us to a visual and aural feast – “Appreciating our local birdsong”. Gearing us up for spring, our field trip was to Morgan’s Track. George Broadway spoke at the October meeting of the Australian Naturalists’ Network trip to the Northern Territory, intriguing us with his tales of experiences and his photos. The proposed field trip to Mount Alexander was hastily changed due to the paucity of flora. Instead we went to Irishtown and especially the Boronia Patch, where there was a fine display of wildflowers.

In November Cathy Powers gave us an enthusiastic talk on Orchids and their interactions with insects. This was followed by a field trip to Pilcher’s Bridge, where unfortunately there were very few orchids to be found. Most committee members were able to take on the role of field trip leader, sometimes deputising at short notice.

Towards the end of 2008, we drew up a complete list of speakers for 2009. We felt this was preferable to searching for speakers at the last moment. The speaker list will be posted out to members with the February newsletter. This year we broached the difficult subject of the Constitution. The club operates on the “model rules” but we were in need of a more up to date Statement of Purpose. The up-dated statement was printed in the June newsletter, giving members until the end of July to offer comments or suggestions for alterations. None was received. Our activity, which was curtailed in 2008 was the regular road-side clean-ups. VicRoads introduced a new set of regulations, which the committee felt was so stringent as to make the activity unviable. VicRoads have since reconsidered their rules and we will look into resuming this activity in 2009.

Again this year we participated in the Annual Bird Count under the leadership of Chris Morris. Debbie Worland keeps us informed on the state of the swift parrots by regular up-dates on sightings near the golf course. Ern Perkins keeps the publications current and supplied to the library and the market building.

This year two of our members received prestigious awards. Ern Perkins was selected to receive the Australian Natural History Medallion. Our youngest member, Amelia Rowe, was winner of the Big Science Competition, a national competition for secondary students. At the time Amelia was only nine years old. Congratulations to these members.

Two institutions of our club - the Dawn Breakfast, with which we start the new year, and the Christmas break-up attract the stalwarts regardless of weather. This year was no exception. The Wildflower Walks remain popular with both club members and non-members. We have an average attendance of 20-25 people over five weeks. We also continue our maintenance work at the bush section of the Botanic Gardens, with our efforts to eradicate the cape broom.

Sadly this year we lost another member with the death of Stuart Morris on 30th April, aged 89. Stuart was a long time member and great contributor to the club. He is greatly missed.

I would like to thank all members of the committee for their unfailing support; George Broadway who again took on the onerous task of secretary, leader of field trips and a Wildflower Walk; Alison Rowe, Treasurer and Web page editor; Noel Young, Newsletter editor, Wildflower Walk leader; Chris Morris, Bird Count co-ordinator, field trip leader; Geraldine Harris, Wildflower Walk leader, deputy Newsletter editor; Rita Mills, club Elder, Wildflower Walk leader and field trip leader; Debbie Worland, Swift parrot co-ordinator; Richard Piesse, field trip leader and who along with Denis Hurley is a great observer of wild life and contributor to the newsletter; Hans van Gemert as Public Officer has greatly assisted us in dealing with various bureaucracies. Also my thanks to behind-the-scenes workers Helen Morris and helpers who ensure that supper is ready on time and Maggie Oliver who has been admirable in packing and mailing the newsletter. Our gratitude goes to Phee and George Broadway for allowing us to meet in their home for the first half of the year.

Finally I wish to thank all club members for their various contributions, without which this club would not be the success it undoubtedly is.

Natalie de Maccus

Notes from Denis Hurley's Diary

7th February 09 Temperature 44+ Time 4pm on

Brown headed Honeyeaters, Red browed Finches, White naped Honeyeaters on damp ground in the lee of a concrete bird bath, huddled together like sheep do on a hot day. Others on the rim looking very distressed. The strong hot wind tended to blow them 20 metres away whenever a Crimson Rosella landed on the rim. Perhaps they (the displaced) were exhausted! Birds were still clustered there after 5pm.

11th February 09

A pair of Speckled Warblers – first sighting for a couple of weeks, but did not see their young. They were working the back lawn and around the house along with Blue Wrens and Red browed Finches. Yellow tailed Black Cockatoos (2 only!) passed over today at 11.15 am.

13th February 09

Two Speckled Warblers working same area as above, as well as Blue Wrens and Scrub Wrens (2 adult and 2 young) Some species such as Grey Fantails are about, but not as frequently as usual. I would like to know what these critters are eating on/off the parched area around the house.

Stray birds - Noel Young

Unusual Sightings of Birds seem to be cropping up more frequently these days, perhaps another result of climate change. Recent examples from the Birdline website are a Yellow Wagtail on the Little River near Geelong, and a Scarlet Honeyeater at Newham

A Field Trip Not Far Afield

Natalie de Maccus

For our field trip on 14th February we explored an area not far from home – an area which so far has no definitive name. It is an area comprised of odd parcels of land with various government owners, which it is hoped will eventually meld to become the “Old Diamond Hill Urban Parklands”. Much of the land adjacent to this area is under consideration for development under the “Diamond Gully Structure Plan”. It is therefore essential that the government - owned land be retained as public open space.

We commenced our tour at the end of Honeycomb Road off Diamond Gully Road under the guidance of Jan Hall and Ian Higgins. We traversed the area of the “landfill buffer zone” owned by the shire. I found this land to be in surprisingly good order with many mature eucalypts and under-story plants. Despite its mine shafts, its proximity to the landfill zone and its neglect over several years it was remarkably light on weeds. Perhaps this was due to the drought, and a good downpour of rain would re-invigorate the gorse and blackberries which still remain.

We travelled north until we reached the southern end of the water treatment ponds, moved east towards Campbell's Creek then followed an unformed walking/bike track until we circled back to our starting point, passing an area of replanting done by the Friends of Campbell's Creek. We found no flowering plants and very few birds, but discovered some ibis feathers (? good or bad sign). Although there is much work to be done the area has great potential to become the breathing space of the area to the south west of Castlemaine.



Mature Eucalypts on the upper slopes

Quarried embankment near the creek

photos Noel Young

Love our Larvae

Denis Hurley

Having been intrigued at the variety of shapes, patterns and vigour of the creatures we call moths, which appear at our lighted window in winter and more so on a hot summer night, I decided to do some reading on the matter.

Someone who knew my interest opened the moth world to me by giving me a book with coloured pictures - very handy for a novice. I have been able to indulge myself in nature's artistry and have learned to appreciate these creatures even more for their role in the cycles of life. For instance, it had never occurred to me that moths might feed on bat guano or wallaby, wombat and koala scats. Some live permanently in bird nests. As I read through this book and realized that moths are pollinators and recyclers, controllers of scale insects and weeds, I realized my latent love of these creatures was not misplaced.

I discovered that some little munchers that have at times destroyed an old, loved, woollen garment, have cute names like *Tinea dubiella* (Tineidae) and have been introduced to Australia. The clothes moth – *Tineola bisselliella* - is one of the most common moths causing damage here. These little sweeties do not come to the light, preferring the secrecy of dark cupboards as they munch on sweaty, smelly garments. The sweat apparently helps them to digest the fibres. Perhaps not so loved, but we should get our identification right, because people mistake other harmless moths for these garment destroyers, which are tiny brown or golden.

Another group – love them! – are leaf litter moths, some seven families in all, with names that use up most of the alphabet, sometimes more than once. These larvae and moths feed on the surface litter that few other creatures will eat – e.g. dry, brown eucalypt leaves. This recycling provides nutrients for our soil and prevents the build up of leaf litter on the ground. One scientist found between 54 and 252 larvae in a series of samples of 130g dry weight of leaf litter in Southern NSW forests.

Mention is made in the book that cyclic burning destroys the larvae and their food source. The authors cite a non-burned area in the Southern Tablelands of NSW that showed no noticeable build-up of leaf litter over a 50 year period. In the light of these findings, they question the need for fuel reduction burns and have called for further research into the role of moths in this process.

Maybe our little ground feeders survive on these critters as well. I have been watching the blue wrens during this desperate summer when so much of their food must have disappeared and wondering what they get

from flipping over the leaves and bark on the ground. If larvae are prevalent, as the above numbers would suggest, then perhaps they are part of the food source for our birds, and we should love our larvae even more.

Further reading: Zborowski, Paul and Ted Edwards (2007). A guide to Australian Moths. CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood VIC.

Community Day at Mt Cole - March 1

George Broadway

We have just returned, Phee and I, from Mt Cole where we attended a community day, organised by the Bendigo District Environment Council, The Ballarat Environment Network (BEN), and Wombat Forest Care. I expected that there might be maybe 100 people at the most, and that it would be a good thing if our club was represented, however I needn't have worried. The event was held at one of the campgrounds on Mt Cole, but we were first directed to an open paddock some distance before the campground, which was turned into a car park for the day. Much to our surprise, when we arrived we found that there were already about 300 or more cars with more arriving by the minute. So to find a space we had to drive a long way down the paddock.

After a cup of coffee to strengthen ourselves, we set off to walk the best part of a km up hill to the campground where we found a very large crowd already ensconced. When we arrived two musicians were entertaining the crowd, so we settled ourselves in to wait for the speeches of which there were not a few.



Phil Ingamells addresses the crowd at Mt Cole
- photo George Broadway

Speeches were made by people representing various groups and organizations, including our Phil Ingamells, speaking for the National Parks Association. Phil made the point that of course DSE needed to do much controlled burning, but that there should be continual monitoring of burnt areas to check the effects, especially at a time of climate change.

Other speakers represented Environmental groups, Friends groups, Landcare, Fire brigades and timber industry. The Timber representative received an enthusiastic reception when he said that the rules should be changed to enable people to gather firewood from the forest. The audience appeared to consist largely of Bush Users, 4WD enthusiasts plus Trail bikers, Bush Walkers. Many it seems had come to protest at what some groups had apparently portrayed as an attempt to lock up the forests as a National Park. When they found that this was not the case many drifted away.

During the speeches the children were entertained by being taken on a bushwalk by two members of the Bendigo FNC

Observations

- ◆ Natasha Harris passed on a sighting by L Dzioba of a goanna on the Guildford Plateau in January (McClures' paddock near the airstrip) – not seen here for 60 years.
- ◆ Resident Blue tongue Lizard still about – Natalie de Maccus
- ◆ Amelia Rowe spotted her first Scarlet Robin for the season on 25th February
- ◆ Garden observations: a pair of White plumed Honeyeaters, Brown headed Honeyeaters, Pardalotes, and a Rufous Whistler, and the Cedar attacked by Corellas - George Broadway
- ◆ Wrens pecking at peaches on the tree - Rita Mills
- ◆ A flock of Musk Lorikeets stripped all the (partially cooked) apples off my tree in two or three days (14th Feb – see cover photo) and on 20th, a flock of ~20 Yellow tailed Black Cockatoos flew over Happy Valley (first seen for this year) – Noel Young
- ◆ At the meeting, Margaret Willis passed around specimens of Mistletoe found on Cootamundra Wattle
- ◆ Helen Morris found a borer hole with an orange tube about 1 cm long extending from it. Some time after breaking it off it had “regrown”
- ◆ Bruce Donaldson noticed a Ringtail Possum in the heat take a drink from a bowl then lie spread-eagled in a tree.
- ◆ Chris Morris had a visit from five Wood Ducks, and wondered if they had heard about the duck shooting season opening March 21

<p>Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club</p>

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

March 2009

Fri Mar 13 meeting: RICHARD HUGHES Wild Country Project

Sat Mar 14: field trip: Crusoe Reservoir, Kangaroo Flat

Fri April 3* meeting: JULIAN HOLLIS on "Climate Change from the Geological Point of View"

Sat April 4* field trip: Some features in the Daylesford area – Leader Julian Hollis

*** Note change of date** - April 10 is Easter Friday

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at Natalies; 65 Johnstone Street, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

Subscriptions for 2009

Ordinary membership: Single \$27, Family \$35

Pensioner or student: Single \$24, Family \$29

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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